

Report
of the
Commission on Theology
and
Church Relations



A Study Document
on
Revelation Inspiration Inerrancy

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

Introduction

The following statements constitute the Commission's first response to assignments given it by the 1962 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. This report addresses itself specifically to the last *Resolved* of Resolution 3-19: "That the Synod request its Commission on Theology and Church Relations to address itself to issues raised by Dr. Scharlemann in his essays" (*Proceedings*, p. 107). It deals also in part with requests made in Resolutions 3-16 and 3-17. (*Proceedings*, pp. 104—106)

The function and the duty of this Commission in a situation such as presented by Resolution 3-19 are defined as follows:

The commission shall . . . consider and seek to adjust matters concerning which differences have arisen in the Synod. . . . The functions of this commission shall be strictly advisory in this capacity, along the line of brotherly effort in the interest of divine truth. (*Handbook*, 2.115 e 3)

We feel that we can best fulfill this function and perform this duty by offering a study document which presents both the position hitherto held by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the position presented by the essays in an exploratory way (as posing contemporary theological questions to which the church should address itself). These positions are hereinafter designated as *Position One* and *Position Two* respectively. Next we have attempted an objective evaluation of both positions. Finally we present a short thesislike statement of the doctrine under discussion which seeks to embody the results of the evaluations and offer conclusions which seem to us to be justified by our studies. In this way we hope to indicate the limits within which and the lines along which our common study of these issues should move and so to give stimulus and direction to a concerted investigation of the problems on the part of all members of our Synod. We invite the reactions of conferences, study groups, and individuals. Please address your communications to the Secretary of the Commission, Dr. A. J. A. Bouman, 801 De Mun Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri 63105. All responses should be in the hands of the Secretary by March 31, 1964.

PART ONE

The Two Positions

I. REVELATION

A. POSITION ONE

1. STATEMENT OF THE POSITION

Our church has no fully articulated, stated position on revelation as such. The practical, nontheoretical, pastoral bent of our theology has placed the emphasis on the inspired Scriptures as the here-and-now available record and instrument of God's revelation and on the preaching of the Word in accordance with it. Our position, generally accepted but never spelled out fully, could be stated in a definition such as Quenstedt's: "Special revelation is the divine external act by which God has disclosed Himself to the human race through His Word to give men knowledge of salvation" (*actus divinus externus, quo Deus sese humano generi per verbum suum patefecit ad salutarem eiusdem informationem*).

2. EVALUATION OF THE POSITION

Quenstedt's definition remains valuable and illuminating. It brings out clearly the Biblical emphases on the divine initiative in revelation, the personal character of revelation (*sese . . . patefecit*), and the universal scope of revelation (*humano generi*). It does justice to God's Word as the instrument of revelation. With the adjective *salutarem* it safeguards the idea of *informatio* against any merely intellectual conception of it, while maintaining the Biblical emphasis on the concrete, specific content of revelation which makes man responsible over against it. And it makes the Gospel the interpretive center of revelation. These are indispensable insights, of basic significance for the proclaiming church.

However, the definition does not do justice to the revelatory character of the acts of God, something which we have always acknowledged practically in our teaching and preaching (Bible history, the festival half of the church year!). Neither does it do full justice to the dynamic character of divine revelation. And the relationship between Scripture and revelation (inspiration and revelation) is not spelled out.

B. POSITION TWO

1. STATEMENT OF THE POSITION

a. *Revelation by Mighty Acts*

The God of Scripture is One who has revealed Himself in mighty acts, which are events within history as interpreted by prophet, apostle, and evangelist. This fact makes it necessary to take history seriously in the study and explanation of the Biblical account. This means that the phenomena of historical limitation and particularity have to be considered in any attempt to understand the Biblical revelation.

b. *Revelation Cumulative*

A study of Scripture from the above point of view will indicate that the revelation there given is cumulative. That is to say, as time went on, God revealed more and more of Himself and of His ways. His revelation of Himself culminates in

the sending of His Son and the creation of His church. This means, for example, that the understanding of God and His ways in Isaiah or St. Paul represents an advance over the days of Moses.

c. The Scriptures in Their Historical Character

The Biblical documents, the inspired record of, and testimony to, God's revelatory acts, were written at given moments in history and are therefore proper objects of historical analysis.

2. EVALUATION OF THE POSITION

a. Revelation by Mighty Acts

Scripture constantly attests God as the God who speaks, who condescends to direct verbal communication to men. "Events within history as interpreted by prophet, apostle, and evangelist" is an ambiguous and misleading formulation, since it leaves unsaid what Scripture emphatically says, namely, that God Himself foretells and interprets His mighty acts.

"The God Who Acts" needs to be supplemented by "The God Who Speaks," the God whose Word precedes and initiates His action, accompanies and interprets His action, and recalls and presents His action as His gift to man and His claim upon man. God's Word spoken into history gives history its direction, its purpose, and its meaning. The words of Amos are a constant reminder of this unbreakable connection between the words and works of God: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7)

Moreover, those words and mighty acts of God which give the Church Militant her buoyant hope and her sober sense of responsibility and so shape her whole work in the world, namely, the Judgment, the resurrection of the dead, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth—these words and acts of God are a living reality for the hoping church only in the prophetic Word and reach us only in the written Word. It is the *Word* of God that alerts men to the consummation of history in judgment and grace.

Unless we retain both the Biblical emphases (speaking God and acting God), we run the risk of trying to appropriate God's revelation with capricious selectivity, and we may hear the reproach which Jesus laid on His contemporaries: "Have you not read?" (Matt. 12:3) and: "Go and learn what this means" (Matt. 9:13). Or we may lapse into that dangerous form of rebellion which has been called "the flight from dogma," that is, we shall no longer permit ourselves to be bound in the obedience of faith by the concrete, specific, personal Word of God.

Since God has not only acted but also spoken at certain times and places, it is obviously "necessary to take history seriously in the study and explanation of the Biblical account." Unless we know what God's Word meant then and there when first spoken, we cannot hear and heed it as a Word for us here and now. But one's judgment on the "phenomena of historical limitation and particularity" will be decisively influenced by one's answer to the question: Who interprets God's acts, the speaking God Himself or men meditating on the acts of God?

b. Revelation Cumulative

That the New Testament revelation is cumulative over against that of the Old Testament is obvious; obvious, too, is the fact that the revelation to be given in the return of our Lord will be cumulative over against that given in His incarnation, death, resurrection, and the sending of the Spirit. One could also apply

the word "cumulative" to the revelation given by the Spirit after Jesus' return to His Father, although Scripture itself speaks of the work of the Spirit rather as of an unfolding and a bringing home to the hearts of men the full significance of the revelation already given in the Word Made Flesh. (John 16:12-15)

Any attempt, however, to trace any strictly regular cumulation of revelation within the Old Testament faces grave difficulties and runs the risk of obscuring other and more significant aspects of revelation, such as the deep inner unity of all aspects of Biblical revelation; the same holds, although to a lesser degree, within the New Testament. Many of the documents cannot be dated with any certainty, and the difficulty of dating increases when one attempts to get behind the documents to hypothetically reconstructed sources. Moreover, there is the constant danger of imposing a pattern upon the material (rather than finding the pattern in the material) and attempting to date documents, or portions of them, according to preconceived ideas as to what is "possible" as revelation in any given period; an unacknowledged legacy from the evolutionary thinking of liberalism often makes itself felt here. Another danger lies in the fact that the interpreter is led to feel that *he* has the right to pass value judgments on earlier revelation in the light of later and fuller revelation. If "cumulative" is taken seriously, it means that later revelation does not cancel out but rests on and is supported by the earlier revelation.

The New Testament tends to view the time of the Old Testament *as a whole* as the time leading up to the great eschatological "Now" (Mark 1:15; Matt. 11:12; Rom. 3:21), as the time of God's long forbearance (Rom. 3:25). Within this period, according to Paul, the giving of the Law marks an epoch in revelation; but the Law, coming 400 years after the promise, is *not* thought of as cumulative over against the promise. Rather it has a negative, subordinate, preparatory, and temporary role to play between the promise and the fulfillment (Rom. 5:20, 21; Gal. 3:19-25). It was the Jews and the Judaizers who viewed the Law as cumulative revelation, as modifying or qualifying or adding to the promise; Paul regards this as an utter distortion of the revelation of God (Rom. 4:13-15; Gal. 3:15-18). Jesus Himself takes this position when He pits God's primal will for man and woman, revealed at Creation, against the divorce law of Moses. (Matt. 19:4-8)

c. *The Scriptures in Their Historical Character*

The statement in Position Two to the effect that the Biblical documents were written at given moments in history and are therefore proper objects of historical analysis—calls for careful evaluation; the presuppositions and methodology of the historical-critical method are involved here. The unconscious fallacy in the sentence is that it operates with two senses of "history." In the first half of the sentence "history" is used in a neutral sense—the Biblical documents came into existence in time and space. In the second half of the sentence "historical" (to judge by the *modus operandi* of historical-critical scholarship generally) is used to indicate our modern, secularized conception of history, dominated by the ideas of causality, contingency, and continuity, without any reference to the influence of divine or diabolic forces in the life of man. To borrow an illustration used by Wilhelm Mundle in his article "The Crisis of Theological Historicism" (*CTM* XXXIII [1962], 389—400), it is like saying: "A five-dollar bill is printed on paper; it should therefore be studied and analyzed as paper." The five-dollar bill is, of course, paper, and the paper is an essential component of the bill; but

to study it merely as paper is to miss all that gives the bill its peculiar meaning and value. Similarly, the Epistle to the Romans is a historical document, a letter written by a prominent first-century religious figure in the interests of his religious concerns; but what gives the Epistle its peculiar meaning and value is the fact that it is "the clearest and purest Gospel," a power of God for salvation—and this fact historical analysis cannot ascertain.

II. INSPIRATION

A. POSITION ONE

1. STATEMENT OF THE POSITION

Baier's terse definition of inspiration, quoted by J. T. Mueller in his *Christian Dogmatics* (p. 102), is a good summary of our traditional position with its characteristic emphasis on the *suggestio rerum*, *suggestio verborum*, and *impulsus scribendi*:

Divine inspiration was that agency by which God supernaturally communicated to the intellect of those who wrote not only the correct conception of all that was to be written, but also the conception of the words themselves and of everything by which they were to be expressed and by which He also instigated their will to the act of writing.

There is in our traditional teaching a strong emphasis on *verbal* inspiration. However, the use of passages which refer, not directly to the inspiration of the *words*, but to the inspiration of the prophets and apostles themselves (e.g., 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:13) indicates that verbal and personal inspiration are not thought of as separate but as organically connected. The connection between inspiration and inerrancy is also strongly emphasized. Both these emphases serve to support the declaration that the Holy Scriptures are unqualifiedly the infallible Word of God, not subject to the judgment of men (cf. the opening paragraphs of *A Brief Statement*).

2. EVALUATION OF THE POSITION

The deep conviction which lives and finds expression in these formulations is a great gift of God to our church. God's gifts are sure, and He delights in adding gift to gift: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given." But man's hold upon God's gift, while man is in the Church Militant, is never automatically sure; we always run the risk of losing the gift we have if we neglect it or deal carelessly with it. It behooves us, therefore, to do the theological work which needs to be done in our generation in the holy fear and to strive to maintain and transmit our fathers' emphasis on the initiative and supremacy of God's grace in all His dealings with man, including inspiration, the resolute submission to the Bible as the Word of God which characterized them, their trembling awe at "It is written."

The conception of inspiration which we have received from our fathers cannot fairly be called mechanical; according to it, the inspired man's *will* is taken up and employed by the Holy Spirit. The inspired writer does not, according to their teaching, become a will-less or depersonalized automaton. But there is a certain tendency toward the intellectual and the impersonal in their formulations—note the terms "agency," "intellect," "correct" in Baier's definition. This needs to be balanced and compensated by giving closer attention to the historical character of inspiration, the "sundry times and divers manners" of God's speaking through men;

by giving inspiration its place in the total activity of the Holy Spirit, thus stressing its dynamic and creative character (not that this aspect of the inspired Word was neglected by our fathers, who took notice of it in their teaching on the Word as a means of grace, but should be noticed directly, in the teaching of inspiration, to safeguard the idea of inspiration against a one-sidedly intellectual conception); and by stating more explicitly the connection between revelation and inspiration.

B. POSITION TWO

1. STATEMENT OF THE POSITION

Since God revealed Himself in mighty acts, there was a revelation before there was a book. St. Paul, for example, proclaimed the revelation of God in Jesus Christ before he had written a single epistle; and the gospels were written even later than that. The Biblical writers therefore were chosen to record and to give their own testimony to God's revelation of His grace and judgment as manifested in the exodus, the exile, the incarnation, etc. The Scriptures may be spoken of as a revelation only in the sense that they are one of the means (Baptism and the Lord's Supper being the other two) by which we are brought into contact with God's mighty acts as we read them or hear their contents proclaimed.

Whatever the Biblical authors wrote they did under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, to which we apply the term "inspiration" in its narrower sense. The Scriptures refrain from giving any specific information on the "how" of inspiration. What they do say distinguishes Biblical inspiration from Greek and pagan notions of this phenomenon. 2 Timothy 3:16 takes over from Genesis 2 the concept of *theopneustos* to say that the Bible is a living book. The application of this special term allows for the view that whatever went into the creation of the Biblical documents (oral tradition, literary sources) is part of inspiration in its wider sense.

2. EVALUATION OF THE POSITION

The strength of the new position lies in the fact that it both distinguishes between revelation and inspiration and also connects the two. The distinction between revelation and inspiration seems, however, to be overstated. According to the Scriptures, the gap between the revelation and the inscripturation of the revelation is sometimes very narrow; recipients of revelation are bidden to write down what they have seen and heard immediately; sometimes the command to write is given even before the recipients have received the revelation (Is. 8:1; Jer. 30:2; 36:2; Hab. 2:2; Rev. 1:11; and often). This overstatement of the distinction is occasioned by the one-sided emphasis, noted above in the discussion of revelation, on the acts of God as the medium of revelation. Conversely, the connection between revelation and inspiration is understated. Paul, for example, connects the Holy Spirit with both revelation (1 Cor. 2:10-12; cf. Eph. 3:5) and inspiration (1 Cor. 2:13); and John establishes a similar connection in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1:10, 11; chapters 2 and 3 — the Christ says; a man writes; the Spirit speaks).

The sentence, "The Biblical writers were chosen to record and to give their *own* testimony to God's revelation," needs clarification. We take it to mean that the writer's individuality is not destroyed or lost under inspiration, a fact to which the individuality and variety of the Biblical writings abundantly testify. It should not be taken to mean that the writers were free, under inspiration, to deal with the given

revelation as they saw fit; they kept their individuality, but they did not enjoy any autonomy. (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:11, 15)

It is difficult to see the need or the propriety of the "only" in the sentence, "The Scriptures may be spoken of as a revelation *only* as they are one of the means . . . by which we are brought, etc." This is the distinctive glory of the Bible, that it *does* bring us into living contact with the words and deeds of God; this is what makes the Bible *the* Good Book. Luther speaks quite openly of *Offenbarung der Schrift*. Why cannot we? In the last analysis, inspiration is simply the ultimate reach, or extension, of God's action in disclosing Himself to man.

The simple equation of Scripture, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, proper though it may be when speaking of them as means of grace, is misleading when speaking of them specifically as means of revelation. We know the sacraments and can enjoy their use because of the witness of Scripture; and as Luther so strongly emphasizes in the Small Catechism, the sacraments get their meaning and their power from *die Worte, so da stehen*. Or, as he says in the Large Catechism concerning the Lord's Supper: "*Hie wollen wir . . . zum ersten lernen, da die Macht an liegt (wie auch von der Taufe), nämlich dasz das fürnehmste Stück sei Gottes Wort und Ordnung oder Befehl.*"

"Special guidance of the Holy Spirit" is weak in comparison with our traditional emphasis on *verbal* inspiration, which brings out the *personal* character of God's communication with man, the ministerial function of inspired men (they are inspired in order to serve men by communicating to them), and the impossibility of distinguishing between the human and divine in the written Word of God. The formulation "special guidance" does not say openly that the Bible is Word of God for us, as we have said and Jesus (Matt. 22:31, 32) and Paul said (Rom. 4:2, 3).

That "the Scriptures refrain from giving any specific information on the 'how' of inspiration" is true, at least so far as the human objects of inspiration are concerned; we know practically nothing of the psychology of inspiration except for the fact that inspiration does not block out personality, character, consciousness, and will. But theologically inspiration, impenetrable miracle though it be, can be and should be explicated by observing the activity of the Spirit generally, by close study of the characteristics of the inspired books themselves, and by reference to the whole theology of the Word of God. Such a study obviously cannot confine itself to passages of Scripture which speak directly of the inspiration of the *Scriptures*; the inspired authors must be considered too. In other words, the inspiration of the Scriptures should be considered in its larger theological context of inspiration generally and of the Word of God.

The connection between the term *theopneustos* of 2 Tim. 3:16 and Gen. 2:7 is not certain. The Septuagint employs a different term in Gen. 2:7 (*emphysao*), which is echoed in John 20:22, where the *personal* inspiration of the apostles is described. In the absence of any verbal link in 2 Tim. 3:16, it is precarious to draw conclusions from a supposed resemblance between God's action regarding Scripture and His action in the creation of man. One is on safer ground if one takes into account the frequent association of the Spirit (*pneuma*) of God with God's speaking through men in Scripture and if one works with the context, which speaks not only in a general way of the Bible (here the Old Testament) as "a living book" but as a sacred book with power, revelatory power, moreover, which can confront man with God, expose him to God's judgment, rescue him with God's grace, train him in

righteousness, and so make him wise for salvation, a man of God complete and equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

That the Holy Spirit in His sovereign freedom did make use of oral tradition and literary sources is no doubt true. But since we have no access to any oral tradition behind the canonical books and in most cases have no direct access to literary sources outside the Biblical books themselves, both the oral tradition and the literary sources must be conjecturally reconstructed. And such reconstructions cannot be the basis for far-reaching theological conclusions. The canon remains the first and last business of the interpreter ministering in and to the church.

III. THE INERRANCY OF SCRIPTURE

A. POSITION ONE

1. STATEMENT OF THE POSITION

A Brief Statement links inerrancy closely with inspiration, and this is characteristic of our traditional teaching:

The Holy Scriptures . . . are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called "theological deduction," but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.

2. EVALUATION OF THE POSITION

The strength of our traditional position lies in the fact that it treats inerrancy as an aspect, or a corollary, of the inspiration of the Scriptures. This procedure presents belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures as a conviction of faith, a *religious* conviction created in us by the power of the Spirit at work in the Scriptures. We confess with the Formula of Concord: "God's Word is not false nor does it lie" (Epitome, VII, 13), and we have this conviction concerning the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Scriptures because we hear in them the voice of the Good Shepherd.

One may legitimately raise the question whether a formulation like that of *A Brief Statement*, which becomes specific only in dealing with inerrancy concerning "historical, geographical, and other secular matters," does justice to the rich variety present in the content and mode of the utterances of the Scriptures. The deductive procedure mentioned in the above paragraph could profitably be supplemented by an inductive approach which would take fuller cognizance of the various modes in which the inspired Word imposes upon believing readers the conviction of its indisputable veracity.

B. POSITION TWO

1. STATEMENT OF THE POSITION

The only proper view of Biblical inerrancy is one that begins with a consideration of the Scriptural understanding of truth. This involves four steps:

- a. a study of the Biblical concept of truth;

- b. an analysis of the way in which Biblical authors use the materials made available to them;
- c. an analysis of the uses and functions of language and of literary genres (as, e. g., in Gen. 1—3);
- d. an awareness of the change that took place in the understanding of "truth" with the Renaissance and especially the Age of the Enlightenment and its refinement of the scientific method.

2. EVALUATION OF THE POSITION

The proposed new position presents much that is of positive value; some of the suggestions made involve large hermeneutical questions which should receive intensive study. Suggestions regarding such a study are made below (Part Two, III, 3). The following may be said by way of reaction to the suggestions even now:

Regarding a. It is not to be expected that a study of the Biblical conception of truth will revolutionize the conception of inerrancy, for in the aspect of truth which is relevant to inerrancy both the Old Testament and the New Testament conception of truth have a broad area of agreement with the conception of truth as conformity to fact or reality. A study of the Biblical concept will, however, serve as a salutary reminder of the person-to-person character of the truth of God's utterances and can preserve us from a one-sidedly intellectual view of inerrancy. Such a study will also alert us to the necessity of discriminating between the various meanings of truth in the Bible and so prevent any haphazard use of "truth" passages in support of the teaching of inerrancy.

Regarding b. "An analysis of the way in which Biblical authors use the material made available to them" works under severe limitations, since in the vast majority of cases we no longer have access to the materials. We cannot base our conception of Biblical truth on conjectural reconstructions of lost materials.

Regarding c. The "analysis of the uses and functions of language" is the perpetual business of interpretation and must be continually pursued; needless to say, the Biblical interpreter cannot commit himself uncritically to a linguistic theory because it happens to be current and choice in his day.

The matter of literary genres, or forms, is also of importance and deserves closer study than it has received in our tradition. But the formal classification of a particular unit of the Bible does not of itself say anything regarding the truth or untruth of its content. In our day the comic-book or cartoon-strip presentation is a definite genre with easily defined characteristics. Yet the form itself says nothing about the character of the content: that content may be the adventures of Bugs Bunny or of Superman, a piece of American history, a life of George Washington, or even a dramatic simplification of the life of Jesus. The genre, or form (where it can be clearly established), does tell us something about the *mode* in which the substance of the communication is conveyed (what conventions prevail, what stylizations one may expect, etc.), but it does not of itself permit any judgment upon the truth or untruth of the substance.

Regarding d. This too is a large and important problem. But the question must be raised and answered: How radically has the conception of truth been changed over the centuries in the minds of the unphilosophic and unscientific multitudes, the 98 percent of mankind to whom the Bible popularly spoke and speaks? How scientifically does even the scientific man speak when he "tells the truth" to his neighbor or his wife?

PART TWO

A Statement by the Commission

I. A STATEMENT ON REVELATION

1. THE ORIGIN OF REVELATION

Revelation is God's act. God discloses Himself to man. He enters man's life, makes Himself known to man, and makes Himself count in the life of man. This act is God's alone; He begins revelation, sustains it, and will conclude and consummate it at the end of days. Man is wholly dependent on God for revelation; he contributes nothing to revelation and cannot in any way control revelation.

2. THE SPAN OF REVELATION

Since the creation of the world God has made Himself known and has made Himself count in the life of man. By showing Himself forth in His works He is continually inviting man to honor and thank Him. Thus all mankind is always confronted by God and is responsible to Him.

Within the framework of this universal self-disclosure God has revealed Himself particularly in the history of His chosen people and in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.

God will conclude and consummate His revelation in the return of His Son, who will judge mankind and gather in His elect, the blessed of His Father.

3. THE MODE OF REVELATION

God reveals Himself by His created works, by His mighty acts in the history of His people and the life of His Son, and by direct verbal communication to men. His Word foretells and initiates the history in which He discloses Himself; it accompanies and interprets that history; and it reports and recalls that history and brings it effectually into the life of man.

4. THE CONTENT OF REVELATION

God in His words and works reveals Himself as One who is fallen man's Judge and yet wills to be man's Father. God wills that man shall be in conscious, personal, willed, responsible, and obedient fellowship with Himself. The content of revelation, His revealed truth, is therefore both: a personal confrontation and concrete, "propositional" truth. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord when men face Him as *their* Lord (personal confrontation) and know that He is the Lord who has created, judged, and redeemed them (propositional truth). This revelation culminates in the sending of the Son, the Word of God; *the* Word is the focus and the interpretive center of all the words of God.

Conclusions

1. We need to work out a comprehensive statement on revelation which takes into account all the Biblical data: the Biblical witness to the universal self-attestation of God in His created works, the massive Biblical witness to the God who speaks as well as acts, and whatever other aspects a fresh study of the Biblical evidence may reveal. Such a statement should operate explicitly with the Law-Gospel distinction and should spell out the relationship between revelation and Scripture.

2. a. The formula "revelation by mighty acts" (or "revelation through history") is an oversimplification which does not take into account all the Scriptural data. When used in isolation from, or in contradistinction to, an equal emphasis on the revelatory speaking of God, it is inadequate and misleading and therefore false.

b. The idea of "cumulative revelation" needs to be formulated with great care and precision in order that the Old Testament may be seen and studied in the perspective indicated by the New Testament and the all-important distinction between Law and Gospel may not be obscured.

c. The "historical analysis" of the Biblical documents may not work with a non-Biblical conception of "historical." The analyzing scholar must remain the believing and obedient scholar who knows that the high majesty of God confronts him in every aspect of these documents, including their historical aspect; he knows that he works as a baptized, committed member of the church whose Confessions "receive and embrace the prophetic and apostolic writings as the clearest and purest fountains of Israel." These writings *in their canonical form* are for him the ultimate authority, the Word of God at which he trembles.

II. A STATEMENT ON THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

The evaluation of both positions has indicated that it may be desirable and useful to establish a broader Scriptural basis for the doctrine of inspiration, one that will relate inspiration more closely with other aspects of God's terrible and gracious self-disclosure. If we place inspiration within its natural and proper framework, that of the whole activity of the Holy Spirit, we shall find that all of the concerns voiced in the evaluations will be met: the emphasis on the power of the inspired Word will inevitably be there, and the connection with history, with revelation, and with Scripture's teaching on the Word of God will be made in an unforced and natural way. The following statement is offered as a suggestion and as a stimulus for further study.

1. THE SPIRIT AND POWER

The Nicene Creed calls the Spirit "Lord and Giver of life," ascribing to the Spirit the ultimate in power. And the very term "Spirit" (*ruach, pneuma*) suggests power—invisible, incalculable, unfettered power, not subject to man's control, mysterious yet real in man's experience of it (cf. John 3:8). Micah practically equates Spirit and power: "But as for me, I am filled with *power*, with the *Spirit* of the Lord, and with justice and *might*" (Micah 3:8), and the New Testament frequently associates "Spirit" with "power" (e. g., Rom. 1:4; 15:13, 19; Eph. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:7).

But the most eloquent testimony to the power of the Spirit is in the fact that the Spirit is pictured as active in creation (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30). Even in his fallen world the Spirit creates the clean heart (Ps. 51:10, 11) and sets man free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). By the power of the Spirit God's new world will be created (Is. 11:2, 6-9; 32:15; 44:3, 4) and the dead people of God restored to life (Ezek. 37:1-14; cf. Rom. 8:11). The body of the resurrected dead will be a "Spiritual" body (1 Cor. 15:44). Even now the presence of the Spirit in the church is the beginning and the guarantee of the new creation; He is the "Earnest," the down payment and pledge, of the world to come. (Eph. 1:13, 14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5)

If we hold fast to this connection between the Spirit and the power in our teaching on inspiration, we shall see in the inspired Word a created and creative Word, a power which man resists or toys with at his peril. We shall have new eyes for the word "correction" (*epanorthosis*) of 2 Tim. 3:16 and shall see in it the miracle of

a creative restoration of fallen and condemned man. We shall see in the inspired Word a potent piece of God's new world in the midst of the old world of sin and death, "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). With such a conception of inspiration, we shall be safeguarded against a moralistic or legalistic use of the inspired Word.

2. THE SPIRIT AND HISTORY

If the Spirit is a power in creation and re-creation, He is also and particularly a power in the history that runs from creation to re-creation. The great leaders of Israel do their work for God and for God's people in the power of God's Spirit: Moses (Num. 11:25; Is. 63:11), Joshua (Deut. 34:9), the judges (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19), Saul (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6), and David (1 Sam. 16:13). The Spirit is *the* power in the history of the people of God (Zech. 4:6; Hag. 2:5) and in the history of nations; *He* prevails, not men and horses (Is. 31:3). New and eschatological vistas are opened up in history by the Anointed of the Lord and the Servant of the Lord, both endowed with the mighty Spirit of the Lord (Is. 11:2; 42:1). And the whole history of our Lord on earth is marked throughout by the presence and power of the Spirit: His conception (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:35), His baptism (Matt. 3:16, 17), His temptation (Matt. 4:1), His triumph over demonic powers (Matt. 12:28), His words (John 3:33, 34; 6:63), His whole Servant ministry (Matt. 12:18; Luke 4:18) — all testify to that. The Spirit directs and governs the witnesses of the Lord, a Philip (Acts 8:29, 39) or a Paul (Acts 16:6, 7); He gives wisdom and insight to the assembled church for action at a crisis in the church's life. (Acts 15:28)

If we hold fast to this connection between the Spirit and history in our teaching on inspiration, we shall have eyes for the historical particularity of the inspired utterances of the Scriptures. We shall be enabled to see both the profound inner harmony of all the words given by the Spirit of God *and* the particular and peculiar coloring or emphasis of each word, as the Spirit spoke in history to the then-and-there needs of the people of God. We shall avoid the danger of trying to make each passage say everything; and we shall, as F. Pieper once said, "walk in the Scriptures as in a garden," whose fruits have the prodigal and salutary variety which marks the gifts of our lavish God.

3. THE SPIRIT AND REVELATION

St. Paul calls the Spirit a "Spirit of . . . revelation" (Eph. 1:17) and directly attributes revelation to the mediation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). John received the revelation of Jesus Christ which was made known to him when he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). The Old Testament likewise connects the Spirit with the revelatory function of the prophets: the prophet is "a man of the Spirit" (Hos. 9:7); he is "filled . . . with the Spirit of the Lord . . . to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8); the Spirit of the Lord falls upon him (Ezek. 11:5). Ezra, looking back over the history of God's people, confesses to the Lord: "Thou . . . didst warn them by Thy Spirit through the prophets." (Neh. 9:30; cf. 9:20)

It becomes difficult to draw a hard-and-fast line between revelation and inspiration. In the inspired Word we are confronted with revelation, with God Himself making Himself known and making Himself count in the life of man.

If we hold fast to this connection between the Spirit and revelation in our teaching on inspiration, we shall never lose sight of the means-of-grace character of the Word; we shall not lapse into the theoretical and the abstract in teaching it. Our

theology will be a healthy and vigorous *habitus practicus*, a hearing-and-doing of the revelatory Word; doctrine and practice will not fall apart.

4. THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD OF GOD

The *connection* between the Spirit and the revelatory Word has already been indicated. What should be noticed further is the fact that there is in the Bible a strong and significant parallelism between the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

Like the Spirit, the Word of God is active in the creation of the world (Gen. 1; Ps. 33:9; 148:5). Like the Spirit, the Word is active in re-creation: When Jesus proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord, the great last year of jubilee begins; the promise is fulfilled "in your ears" (Luke 4:19-21). When the enthroned King declares that He is making all things new, the world becomes new (Rev. 21:5). Like the Spirit, the Word is active in history, shaping and controlling history; one need but think of God's name, God's Law, and God's promise in the history of Israel (cf. Is. 9:8; 40:8). Like the Spirit, the Word is the source of prophetic, revelatory power. Whether the Word of the Lord comes to a man (e.g., Jer. 2:1) or the Spirit of the Lord falls on a man (Ezek. 11:5), the same act of God is being described; the same miracle of divine self-communication through man is being portrayed. The fact that John the Baptist is filled with the Spirit and the fact that the Word of God comes to him (Luke 1:15; Luke 3:2) both signify the same thing: that John is a prophet of the Most High (Luke 1:76). When Paul calls his apostolic Word the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13), he is saying the same thing as when he says that he speaks in words taught by the Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:13)

If we hold fast to this conception of the Word in our teaching on inspiration, we shall not fall prey to our generation's despair at the adequacy of words. Our preaching will be confident and free. Word and sacrament will be seen in their organic unity; the strong Word character of the sacraments and the sacramental character of the Word (the "real presence" of God in His Word) will both be living and working realities in our worship—and all life will be worship.

Conclusions

1. Neither a mere repetition of our traditional formulations nor the adoption of the proposed new position will serve the needs of our church today.

2. We shall do well to work from the strength of our traditional position and to build upon it as a foundation for a more comprehensive Scriptural formulation of the doctrine of inspiration.

3. The following formulation may serve as a basis for further discussion:

When we speak of verbal inspiration, we are speaking of the Creator Spirit at work among men in their history, where He chooses, shapes, and endows men for His purposes. We are speaking of the Creator Spirit at work in men, claiming their will for free obedience to God and creatively making their words the fit and adequate vehicles for the Word of God. This makes inspired men's words the very words of God, the means whereby men are confronted by the grace of God in Christ. To reject these words spells death; to accept them and live them spells life.

III. A STATEMENT ON THE INERRANCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

A definition of inerrancy which attempts to find a common denominator for all the varieties of utterance in the Bible must necessarily be quite general. Otherwise we shall have a definition which covers only the more soberly narrative elements of

the Scriptures and leaves unnoticed such features as the bold language of prophecy and of adoration, the pictorial promises of the world to come which can suggest the ineffable future only by means of images drawn from this fallen world, the attribution of human features and passions to God, the symbolic use of numbers, etc. The following attempt is to be judged with this in mind:

In calling the Scriptures inerrant the church is expressing the conviction of faith that these words, as words taught by the Holy Spirit, are truthful, wholly reliable, and uniquely powerful witnesses to the words and works of God and that these inspired words in their concrete human form are the very voice of the God of her salvation.

Our brethren of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia have, in their "Theses on Scripture and Inspiration," dealt with the question of inerrancy in exemplary fashion, asserting the inerrancy of the Scriptures as a matter of faith—faith in a mystery which is not rationally demonstrable:

With the whole true Church of God we confess the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. This inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures cannot be seen with human eyes, nor can it be proved to human reason; it is an article of faith, a belief in something hidden and not obvious. . . . God made use of [the holy writers] in such a manner that even that which human reason might call a deficiency in Holy Scripture must serve the divine purpose. Furthermore, it pleased the Holy Ghost to employ authors possessing various gifts for writing on the same subject. How in such cases it is possible that differing accounts of the same event or the same saying are the true and inerrant report of one and the same fact cannot and need not always be shown by rational harmonization. We must believe it until "that which is in part shall be done away" and "that which is perfect is come" (1 Cor. 13:10).

Conclusions

1. We reaffirm the deeply felt conviction of our fathers and of our Confessions that "God's Word is not false nor does it lie."

2. We deem it desirable that the deductive approach of our tradition be complemented by an inductive approach.

3. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations will, in cooperation with the School for Graduate Studies of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, authorize a team of two or three competent and recognized scholars of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to take up and investigate the problems raised and to present their findings to the church in compendious form. These scholars shall deal with all the problems raised but shall not be bound to the approach suggested.

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